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Between Assimilation and Discrimination: Immigrants' Religiosity in Europe

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Abstract

Given the sharp increase in migration flows, the issue of immigrants' religious assimilation and its impact on integration and discrimination has become a hot topic. This article refers to the debate between assimilation and reaction theories in order to shed light on the effects of both the destination context and the passage of time on immigrants' religiosity. Using the nine waves of European Social Survey data, I show that non-Muslim migrants display tendencies towards assimilation, with second generations being more similar to the native population than to the first generations in terms of levels of religiosity. Conversely, Muslim migrants are seen to resist more to assimilation pressures, thus reinforcing a reading based more on ethnic reactions. In addition to this, the data clearly show that there is a specific sector of the migrant population – younger second-generation Muslims – who feel a greater sense of discrimination because of their religion compared to both people from different religions and to their first-generation parents. This makes them a very relevant group to study because of the effects of this discrimination on socioeconomic and educational integration.

Keywords: Assimilation, Religiosity, Immigrants.

Introduction

Given the sharp increase in immigrant flows from both within and outside Europe in recent decades, the study of immigrants' values and beliefs in general, and of their religiosity in particular, has become an issue of central interest. Indeed, European countries have become much more ethnically diverse as they have dealt with various waves of migration. While some countries like Germany, Great Britain, Belgium and the Netherlands started to attract low-skilled labour migrants and immigrants from their colonies back in the sixties, nations in the Mediterranean area, such as Italy or Spain, once sending countries themselves, started to receive immigrants in the late seventies (Castles & Miller, 2003; van Tubergen & Sindradóttir, 2011). Coming to the present day, Eurostat estimated that in 2019 2.7 million people migrated to the EU-27 countries from non-EU states, but also that 1.4 million people previously residing in one EU-27 Member State migrated to another Member State (Eurostat 2020), this “internal” migration roughly corresponding to 36% of the total.

Not surprisingly, the increase and diversification of the migration flows, and the stigma associated with some migrants' religious characteristics, fast became hot topics in the western democracies. This, together with issues related to the (poor) socioeconomic integration of migrants, makes every attempt to shed light on their religious patterns very precious. While religion is certainly a relevant topic for first-generation migrants, it becomes more than fundamental for the second (and following) generations growing up in a very different context to that of their parents. Within this more general approach, an entire stream of literature has focused

on the difficulties faced by Muslim immigrants and their children in integrating in the new contexts (Buijs & Rath, 2006), their religious characteristics providing fundamental analytical and theoretical lenses for this line of research.

Many works have shown that ethnic minorities (Muslims in particular) are more religious than the native majority and also that they invest more in the transmission of religiosity to the following generations (de Hoon & van Tubergen, 2014; Güngör, Bornstein, & Phalet, 2012; Molteni & Dimitriadis, 2021; Soehl, 2017; van Tubergen & Sindradóttir, 2011). These religious differences and specificities can arise for different reasons, many of them revolving around the interplay between the characteristics of the origin and destination contexts. Especially when coming from countries outside Europe, immigrants find a social environment that is very different from their birthplace in both general and religious terms. Indeed, the degree of religiosity is much lower in Europe than in the main countries of origin and in Europe being religious is progressively being seen as a choice and not as a given (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012). What is the impact of this changed environment on immigrants' religiosity? Do they tend to align themselves with the new situation or do they react and strengthen their religious beliefs and values? And what about their children? Are there any differences between the first and the second generations of migrants? And what effect does individual religiosity have on the discrimination perceived by the immigrants?

These are the main questions I have sought to answer in this article. By adopting a quite innovative approach that takes advantage of European Social Survey data, the aim is to shed light on the complex relationship between the religious and political characteristics of the destination contexts, the passage of time and specificities of the immigrants' religiosity. Particular attention is paid to the situation of the second generations and younger generations in general.

The article will start by sketching the main theories behind the study of immigrants' religiosity, with special attention to the distinction between assimilation and reaction. I will then clarify the four major questions it will try to answer and briefly describe some of the methodological choices that have been made. Following this, four different paragraphs will provide empirical results that can be used to answer the four questions mentioned above. Finally, the concluding section will try to link all the results together and draw an organic picture of immigrants' religiosity and its evolution.

1. Immigrant Religiosity Theories

In light of the complexity sketched out above, I shall now present an overview of the main theoretical lenses that can be used to read the relationship between migration processes, settlement and religiosity. Given the salience of the topic, many different theories have been proposed in recent decades. Nevertheless, almost all of them can be placed into two main baskets. On the one hand, we find the so-called *assimilation theories* (plural), with *reaction theories* on the other. Generally speaking, the former have mainly been developed in the context of the United States where, given the many religious similarities between immigrants and the native population, religiosity is usually seen as something promoting integration and facilitating adaptation. Quite differently, the latter theories have mainly been developed in a European context having to deal with mass migration from Muslim countries. Nevertheless, in Europe too, a good portion of the total migration flows take place between countries sharing similar religious traditions (i.e., Christian coun-

tries) and this makes the interplay between the two theories a very useful theoretical lens in order to interpret the European situation.

Finding a place among what are called *assimilation theories* are all the approaches arguing immigrants' tendency, the longer their stay continues, to become similar to the natives. This tendency can regard many aspects of behaviour and attitudes (religion included) and can also be observed as moving from one generation to another (Alba & Nee, 1997; Jacob & Kalter, 2013). According to De Vaus (1982), this happens because immigrants become increasingly exposed to the norms of the receiving country, hence they adapt to the mainstream culture of the new context. This idea sometimes also goes under the name of social integration theory (Need & de Graaf, 1996) and can also be found among the many contributions (mainly from social psychologists) analysing the possible outcomes of acculturation processes, one of which can be assimilation (Sam & Berry, 2010). Immigrants' religiosity can also be interpreted following the basics of the classic secularization theory (Bruce, 2002; Wilson, 1982). In fact, it is expected that the higher the levels of modernization in the receiving countries, in the same way as for the natives, the more negative the impact on the immigrants' religiosity. From an empirical point of view, the main expectation of the scholars supporting this group of theories is to observe a religious decline across the migrant generations (Connor, 2010; Güveli & Platt, 2011; Smits, Ruiter, & van Tubergen, 2010) and over time (Diehl & Schnell, 2006).

While these theories give a good description of a more general situation, the fact that Islam in Europe has become a very strong source of social division (Ricucci, 2017) and a barrier to integration (Foner & Alba, 2008; Voas & Fleischmann, 2012) paves the way for scholars supporting the so-called *reaction theories*, often also known as reactive ethnicity theories. According to this stream of thought, this reaction occurs in the event that immigrants experience discrimination and exclusion in the host societies: when this happens, immigrants can react by strengthening their ethnic (and religious) identities (Connor, 2010; Diehl & Schnell, 2006; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Since this supposed reaction is strictly linked with feelings of exclusion and discrimination, it is usually associated with Muslim populations. Indeed, many contributions have shown Muslim immigrants' religiosity to remain stable – or even increase (van Tubergen & Sindradóttir, 2011). In addition to this, it is also thought that parents from ethnic minorities are more successful in transmitting religiosity than natives (de Hoon & van Tubergen, 2014) because their minority status forces them to invest more in the religious upbringing of their children (Kelley & de Graaf, 1997).

As per their own formulation, these two blocks of theories aim to read and interpret the migrants' processes of adaptation or reaction in a new context. It is for this same reason that the characteristics of the receiving contexts – both in terms of religious environment and political settings – play an enormous role in the debate. These features can be so relevant as to shape both the immigrants' actions and their efforts to transmit values, beliefs and patterns of behaviour, religiosity included (Molteni & Dimitriadis, 2021).

When it comes to studying the effect of the religious context in the destination country, the very general reading is that the natives' religiosity has a positive effect on immigrants' religiosity (van Tubergen & Sindradóttir, 2011). This interpretation comes straight from the basics of assimilation or social integration theory, which states that immigrants tend to adjust to the norms of the native population. Therefore, immigrants who settle in very religious countries such as Ireland or Poland are more likely to be more religious than immigrants who migrate to more secular

settings, such as Scandinavian countries. This may also happen, of course, even if the potential selection effects on migration as well as the effects of the migration process itself are excluded (Hagan & Ebaugh, 2003; Hirschman, 2004). Clearly, this is not a process that happens instantaneously; immigrants probably need some time to adapt their systems of beliefs and values to the new context and it is only likely to be their children who show tendencies towards assimilation. All these aspects, together with potential differences between religious traditions in these assimilation processes, will be investigated further in this article.

In addition to the interest in immigrants' religiosity per se, this topic is also very relevant because of the impact that religious beliefs, values and symbols can have on integration processes. On the one hand, it has been shown that individual religiosity plays a strong role in immigrants' integration because it impacts their educational attainment (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2012; Triventi, 2019), socioeconomic outcomes (Connor & Koenig, 2013), civic engagement (McAndrew & Voas, 2014) and many other attitudes, such as those towards gender roles (Kretschmer, 2018). In addition to this general reading, it is also seen that affiliation with Western religions is usually associated with better integration outcomes, while affiliation with non-Western religions can be a strong obstacle to acculturation (Foner & Alba, 2008; Kogan, Fong, & Reitz, 2019; Wuthnow & Hackett, 2003). It is clear how this difference brings the aforementioned debate between assimilation and reaction theories into play once again.

All these obstacles to integration can be even more salient when looking at younger immigrants, who may perceive discrimination as driven by religious characteristics. This is a major concern in many receiving countries because of its strong socioeconomic impact, with outcomes such as high unemployment rates among young people. In this regard, religion can play a twofold role for youths and young adults. On the one hand, it can facilitate the formation of a sense of belonging that can provide both social and emotional support (Kogan et al., 2019; Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010) together with the formation of cultural values that can deter deviant behaviours (Sherkat & Ellison, 1999). The downside of this strong role of religion in identity-making processes is evidently that religious identification may work as a signal that activates stereotypes (Kogan et al., 2019). The saliency of religion as a boundary-maker has been repeatedly shown, but it is not only the display of religious symbols like the veil, *kippah* or *dastar* that can activate such stereotypes; the trigger can even reside in such simple indicators as a name (Alba, 2005). This can have a strong impact on integration patterns or perceived discrimination, especially for young people, also because in secularized societies strong markers of religious involvement can be read as signals of conservatism or backwardness (Kogan et al., 2019). While the focus of this article will be more on perceived discrimination than socioeconomic integration, many of these aspects will be dealt with in the following pages.

Aim of the article. Contexts, generations, time and discrimination: four issues to be explored

Before moving onto the more empirical sections, it is worth recalling that almost all of the theories linking immigrants' religiosity, its transmission, its role, and its effect on integration and discrimination are very concerned with time. This because the very concepts of assimilation or integration – and even reaction – are based on the convergence – or divergence – of some characteristics over time.

By explicitly starting from the main theoretical issues presented above, the main aim of this article is to provide a picture that is as up-to-date as possible about four core matters related to this debate, with special attention to the situation of the second generations and younger people in general. When necessary and informative, details about different religious traditions will be provided as well as differences from the native population. Without a doubt, these four issues are very closely related, but for clarity they can be split into four separate paragraphs and serve as a sort of index for the presentation of the empirical information. They are:

1. The role of the receiving context (very religious or secular, more or less favourable to integration) in shaping immigrants' religiosity
2. Generational changes in religiosity, namely the differences between first and second generations
3. The effect of time since migration for the first generation of immigrants
4. The effect of denomination and age on perceived discrimination.

2. Measurement and Methodological Choices

There are many analytical and methodological choices behind the analyses at the core of this article, which will be presented shortly. The idea is to list the most relevant ones in a single paragraph in order to make the next sections easier to follow.¹

Data

The first choice regards the data to use. In fact, the following lines of argument are built upon data coming from the nine available waves of the European Social Survey project, a high-quality and standardized cross-national data set covering 38 European countries. Despite not being explicitly targeted at migrants, these data are becoming an increasingly relevant source for the study of migrant populations, as shown by the growth in the number of contributions using them as a basis (see, for example, van Tubergen & Sindradóttir (2011)). Since the ESS data are collected every two years (from 2002 to 2018), they can furnish a very up-to-date and detailed picture of both the native and migrant populations. Hence, they also permit multi-group comparison, which is fundamental when studying immigrants in the destination countries.

It might be wondered whether data not explicitly designed to study specific populations are able to sample them correctly. This is not the place to go deeper into this discussion, but what needs mentioning is that the shares of the foreign population estimated (for every available year and country) using ESS data show a 0.89 correlation with the same figures from Eurostat. This is a precious indication of the absence of strong distortions in the data and the ability of ESS to reach a fairly correct proportion of immigrants. Clearly, this does not close the debate because some other flaws are likely to exist when using data that are not designed ad hoc. In this case, the main shortcoming of the ESS data is that the interviews were carried out in the official national languages, and this therefore probably means immigrants who are not fluent in the language of the country of the interview are underrepresented.

¹ Additional details about the management of the variables together with their distributions can be found in the appendix.

Dependent variable

When studying religiosity from a sociological point of view, multidimensionality is a core issue to address. This arises from the fact that the broad concept of religiosity consists of a mixture of closely interrelated supernatural, practical, ritual and normative aspects (Molteni & Biolcati, 2018). As a result, there are different possible ways of measuring such a complex concept, which can be summarized by referring to four possible strategies. First, the researcher can focus on just one dimension which is intended to be very relevant for that specific analysis (i.e., attendance of religious services when studying the public dimension of institutional religions). Second, the researcher can focus on more than one dimension in order to discuss the possible differences between them (see, for example, the debate about “believing without belonging” (Davie, 1990)). Third, different dimensions can be combined into a typology in order to analyse specific religious profiles. Fourth, a religiosity index can be built summarizing many different dimensions in a single value. Of course, there are pros and cons to every choice as well as a trade-off between completeness and simplicity. Given its broad-scale approach, for this article I chose to build a religiosity index by combining the answers to three questions about service attendance (“*Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, about how often do you attend religious services nowadays?*”), prayer (“*Apart from when you are at religious services, how often, if at all, do you pray?*”) and self-definition (“*How religious are you?*”). These three dimensions have been rescaled to create a religiosity index ranging from 0 to 10 (see Appendix *c* for details). The main advantage of this procedure is that it gives a single, compact measure that can be used in the analysis. This choice may be criticized, especially when adopting a multi-denominational framework like in this case, because of the different meanings the different confessions attach to the various dimensions. Attending religious services every day, for example, can be a very strongly felt duty for a practicing Catholic but not for a Buddhist, even a very religious one. This issue is even more salient in the case of immigrants, who can also have problems in finding their places of worship, especially in the countries with the most recent migration history (Wuthnow & Christiano, 1979). This possible distortion linked to the use of a single index can be partially controlled by referring to Cronbach’s alpha as a measure of internal consistency. The value of alpha for the entire population is 0.79, while it is slightly lower for the Christian (0.71) and the Muslim (0.65) populations. Similarly, the value is 0.78 for the native population, 0.75 for the second generations and 0.74 for first-generation immigrants. These values tell us that a possible distortion due to denominationally specific meanings of the different dimensions can exist, but also that this distortion is so small that it cannot have a large impact on the results of the following analyses.

A conscious choice was made not to incorporate information about religious belonging in the religiosity index. Indeed, from a purely methodological point of view, the associated question shows a lower correlation with the aforementioned items and this is a reflection of the fact that belonging to a religion (or to a denomination) can be intended more as a permanent or semi-permanent characteristic similar to nationality or ethnicity (McAndrew & Voas, 2011; Voas, 2014) than actual individual religiosity. Instead, this information has been recoded into four categories (Christian, Muslim, Other, No Denomination) and extensively used to distinguish between the different groups of immigrants and natives.

Generations of immigrants and the issue of time

A major part of this article revolves around the differences in religiosity between natives and second- and first-generation immigrants, hence the need to precisely describe how these categories have been identified using the ESS data. The choice was to follow a very basic definition which identifies *natives* as those born in the country under study from parents also born in that country, *second-generation immigrants* as those born in the country under study from at least one parent born abroad, and *first-generation immigrants* as those born outside the country under study from parents also born abroad. Overall, the ESS data enabled the sampling of 36,153 first-generation immigrants and 33,565 second-generation ones (plus 345,648 natives). On a similar level, another piece of information emerged as very useful when reading the possible changes in religiosity of the first-generation migrant populations: the time since migration. Unfortunately, the answer format relating to this question changed between the first four waves and the more recent ones: hence, I chose to stick to the categories used in the first 4 waves (within the last year, 1-5, 6-10, 11-20 and more than 20 years ago). For all the other variables, including those about perceived discrimination, no particular operations were performed (details can be found in Appendix *d*).

3. Destination Contexts, Generations, Time and Perceived Discrimination: What ESS Data Can Tell Us

As said in the previous paragraph, this article is based on the data coming from the nine available waves of the European Social Survey. Appendix *a* provides a preliminary look at the sample and depicts some general characteristics of the broad European context, showing the share of natives, first- and second-generation immigrants for all the countries in the sample. As a general reading, what emerges is that the share of immigrants is much lower in the countries belonging to the Visegrád group compared to both other Eastern European and continental and Scandinavian countries.

Alongside this, Appendix *b* shows a relevant addition to this information: the differences in religious belonging of the first-generation immigrants. What emerges from this is that all Eastern European countries show a negligible share of non-Christian immigrants, and this strongly points towards the “internal” migration which characterizes the countries from the former Soviet bloc. Conversely, countries from the other European regions are shown to be the preferred migration destination for Muslim immigrants, with Belgium, France, Italy and Germany showing the highest rates (23.4, 20.7, 20.3 and 16.2 percent respectively). Evidently, Turkey and Israel are the clear exceptions to this pattern, with the former attracting only (but nevertheless very few) Muslim migrants and the latter only attracting Jewish migrants (here under the label “Other”).

The importance of the receiving context

The first theoretical issue this article aims to shed light on concerns the effect of the religious characteristics of the destination contexts. As said before, the overall idea behind the assimilation theories is that immigrants tend to replicate many of the values and beliefs as well as the cultural and behavioural patterns of the natives, including those relating to religion. Moreover, this general tendency can be

intended as needing some time to unfold or, more likely, the passage from one generation to another.

Figure 1: Average religiosity of natives, second- and first-generation immigrants by country

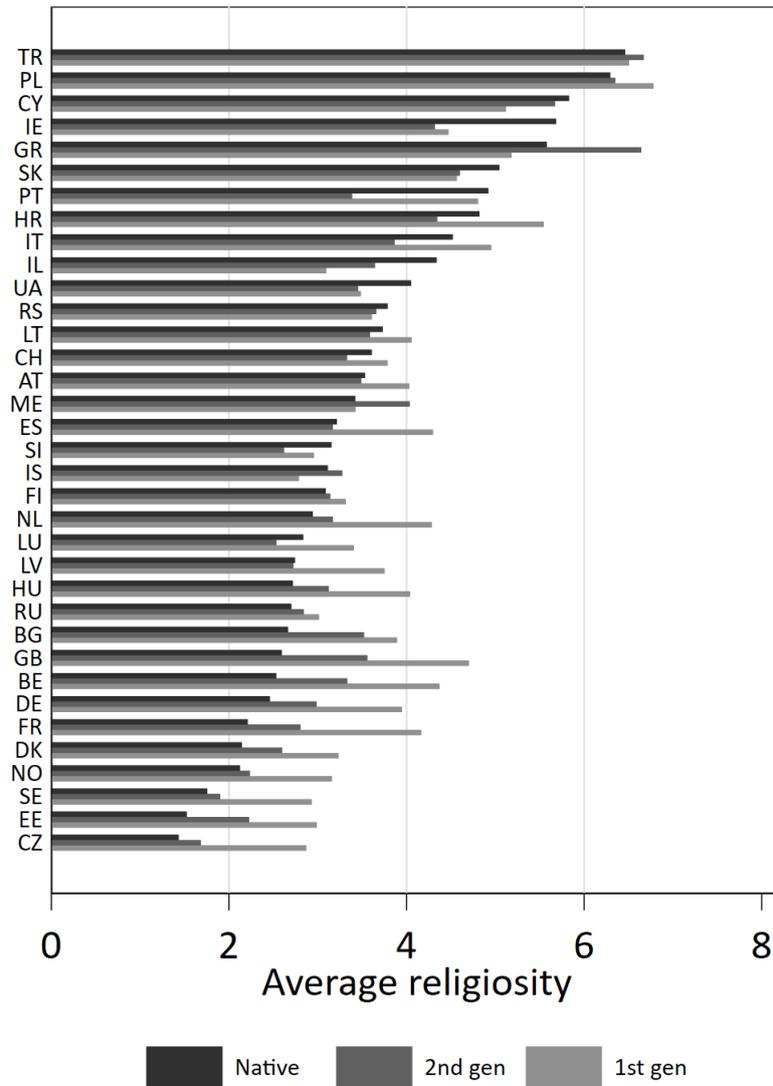
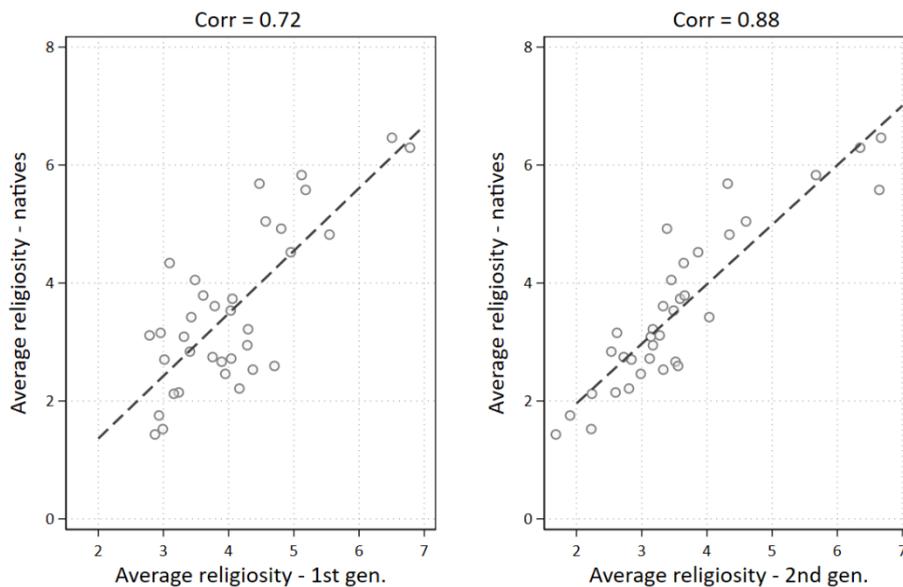


Figure 1 shows two main relevant pieces of information. On the one hand, the idea that the religious destination contexts may also drive the immigrants’ religiosity finds some support in the data. Indeed, very few differences emerge between natives and immigrants, and this is particularly true when looking at the most religious countries (those at the top of the list). On the other hand, the fact that many “spikes” can be seen when looking at the more secular countries suggests that first-generation immigrants bring a “stock” of religiosity with them that takes time to disappear or to drop to similar levels as the natives. In fact, these differences become much smaller when looking at the second generations.

This reading can also be reinforced by looking at Figure 2. Overall, it shows high correlations between the country averages of religiosity for both the first and second generations and the natives. That said, the correlation coefficient is much higher when looking at the second generations, and this is a clear signal of assimilation.

lation occurring from one generation to the next. Based on these data, two main things can be said. Firstly, the religious context of destination has the potential to shape the religiosity of the immigrants but, secondly, this effect is much more evident when looking at the second generations, namely those raised in the new context and therefore exposed to the norms and values of the native population. In any case, both these conclusions support the basic ideas of the assimilation scholars.

Figure 2: Average country-level religiosity of natives, first and second generations, and correlation coefficients



What I have just shown represents a good way to generally frame the question, but it is plainly not enough. In order to make a step further, the differences that exist between the first- and the second-generation immigrants can be somehow read as the speed and the strength of the assimilation pressure: the bigger this difference, the stronger the assimilation. Of course, many aspects interact and contribute to this assimilation together, but clearly the general context and the system of policies in the destination countries play a major role. Migrating to a country where basic rights are guaranteed and where immigrants can find equal opportunities and feel secure about their future can represent a great incentive to integration. In a purely comparative framework like that of this article, the use of the *Migrant Integration Policy Index* (MIPEX, 2020) is a good way to better specify the institutional setting that immigrants find in the destination country. The index, which ranges from 0 to 100, puts together a lot of information covering topics such as employment rights, health, discrimination, education, political participation, and laws about permanent residence and family reunification. Looking at the distribution of the index, we see Scandinavian countries and Portugal scoring very highly, while central European countries feature in the middle of the rank. On the opposite side, Eastern European countries occupy a much lower ranking.

Figure 3: Migrant Integration Policy Index (x-axis) and difference between first- and second- generation religiosity (y-axis). The size of the markers is proportional to the religiosity of the natives

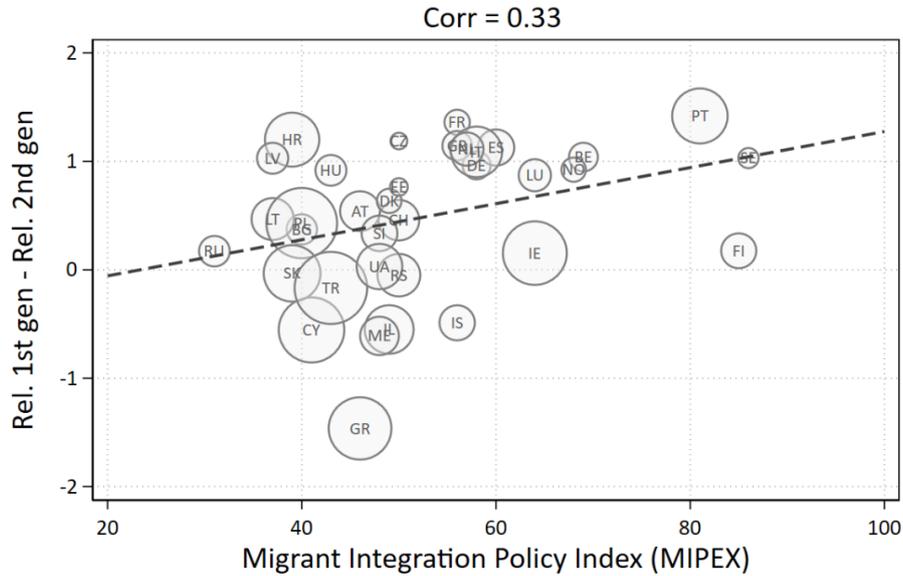


Figure 3 puts together the country figures from the index with the difference between the religiosity of the first-generation and second-generation migrants, here intended as a measure of the strength of religious assimilation. Generally speaking, we can see a positive association between the two measures, with countries that are a good integration setting also reporting more effective religious assimilation, and viceversa. In order to provide a better argument on this issue and to further this general association, Figure 3 can be read as showing three main patterns. On the one hand, we have Scandinavian countries showing low levels of religiosity for natives and a good integration setting, resulting in a high assimilation tendency among the migrants. On the other hand, Central and Mediterranean countries display average levels of native religiosity and an average integration setting but robust tendencies towards assimilation. Lastly, Eastern countries show a rather poor integration setting and high levels of native religiosity which together contribute to a low tendency towards assimilation. Within this general reading, Greece clearly represents the outlier given that it shows high native religiosity, but also a situation where second-generation migrants are far more religious than the first generation.

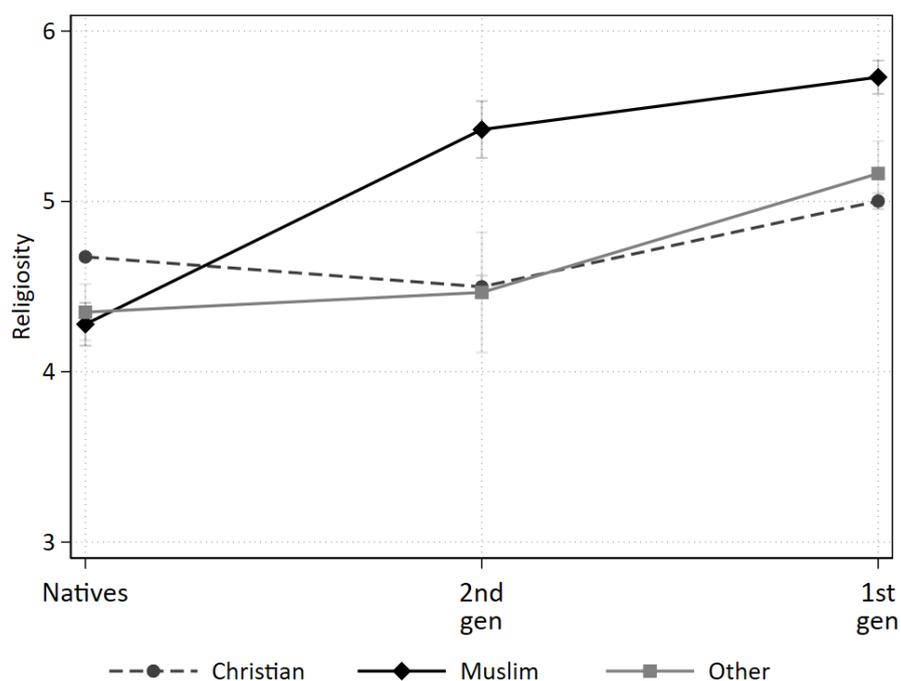
Religious differences between generations

Following from what I have just said, one of the basic mechanisms behind social and cultural change is based on intergenerational differences. In the most basic definition, a generation is usually intended as a group of individuals raised in similar situations and in similar contexts; what is more, many long-term changes in values and behavioural patterns are often thought to emerge because new and younger generations replace the older ones. As far as immigrants are concerned, something similar can be thought, with the additional fact that the parents and children have been raised in completely different contexts, surrounded by completely different people. While first-generation immigrants are socialized in a context consisting of people sharing many characteristics with them, second generations stand halfway between a family context more linked to the origin and other socialization agencies and groups of peers reflecting the destination context. As a result, scholars

supporting the assimilation and social integration theory expect second generations to be more similar to the natives than the first generation because of the role of the new context in shaping their patterns of values, beliefs and behaviours.

When looking into this, it is also necessary to introduce denominational differences into the theoretical equations. Indeed, Muslim immigrants are often thought to be stigmatized and discriminated because of their religion, and many scholars have hypothesized the tendency to react by strengthening their religiosity and putting a lot of emphasis on the religious upbringing of their children. We see some confirmation of this in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Average religiosity of natives, first and second generations divided by main religious denominations²



What the figure shows is that Christian immigrants and immigrants belonging to other denominations behave quite similarly. In fact, these two groups show a fairly steep decline in religiosity when moving from the first to the second generation, while substantially no differences exist between the second generations and natives. This can be read as the fact that the religious assimilation of non-Muslim immigrants proceeds quite quickly and the passage from one generation to the following is sufficient to fill the gap. It is enough to be raised in the new religious context – which is almost homogeneously Christian – to make the second generations very similar to the natives.

In quite the opposite manner, the religiosity of Muslim immigrants appears much stronger than that of the other denominations; moreover, smaller differences are seen between the first and second generations. In addition to this, a very large gap is evident between natives and individuals with a migratory background. This gap is not present when looking at the other denominations. The story behind this

² In order to make this graph more meaningful, Turkey and Israel have been removed from the sample in order not to inflate the religiosity of Muslim natives or natives from other denominations.

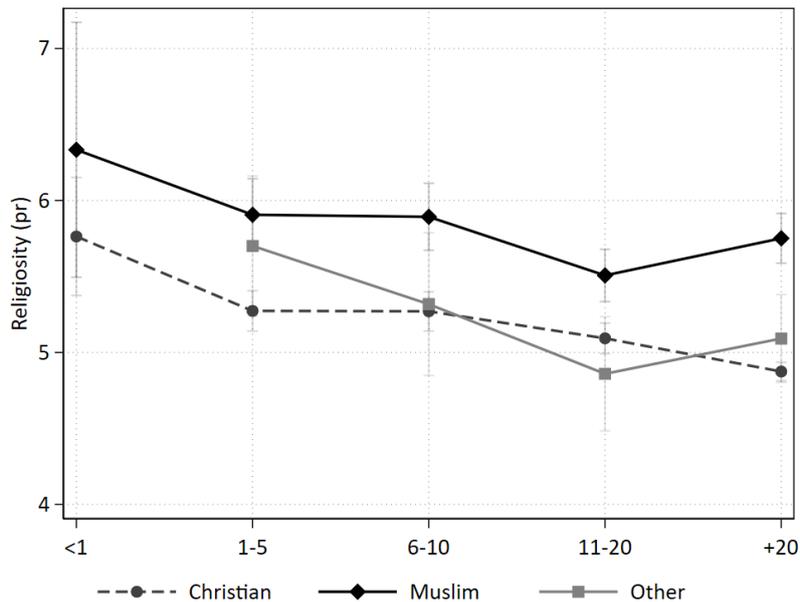
speaks about a much longer and more complicated process of assimilation – if any – for Muslim migrants.³ To put it more simply, it can be concluded that Muslim immigrants experience barely any loss in the faith inherited from the country of origin.

Time since migration and religious decline

While the focus on the different generations emphasizes – somewhat implicitly – the role of the different context of socialization, there is also another way for the immigrants to adapt or react to the new situation. Obviously only applying to first-generation migrants, this factor is the passage of time since the moment of migration. The idea behind this is very straightforward: as time passes since the migration to the new context, first-generation immigrants become progressively exposed to the norms of the receiving country and more likely to modify their old patterns of values, beliefs and behaviours and to develop new ones, whether similar to or in conflict with the native ones. In this case, it is not the passage between generations that is responsible for the religious change, but rather the individuals who change their beliefs as time goes by.

Figure 5 shows the effect of the passage of time on the religiosity of first-generation immigrants by dividing them into the categories of Christian immigrants, Muslim immigrants and immigrants from other denominations.⁴

Figure 5: Average religiosity of Christian, Muslim and first-generation immigrants from other denominations, divided by the time since migration



³ These results cannot be interpreted further because of the peculiarity of Muslim natives, who are only concentrated in a few European countries such as Bulgaria, Montenegro and the Russian Federation.

⁴ Because of the characteristics of the sample, we cannot really trust the results about the immigrants who migrated less than one year before. This is because this category corresponds to very recent migrants who are supposed to be fluent in the language of the new country. This results in very low numbers as well as the potential risks of selection biases.

Similarly, as before, we can advance both a general interpretation of the graph, and some denominationally specific readings. The general idea is that the basics of assimilation theory find support in the data: as the time since migration passes, the immigrants tend to become slightly less religious. However, it is necessary to point to some interesting features within this general reading. In fact, the only category of migrants showing a clear decline or monotonic religious pattern is Christian migrants. Quite differently, Muslim migrants and migrants of other denominations show a similar declining pattern in the range of 1 to 20 years since migration, but at the same time those who migrated a long time ago (more than 20 years) show a higher value of religiosity. This is not the place to go further into this, but additional research is welcomed to shed light on the reasons behind the higher religiosity of this group. It may be that after completely settling down, non-Christian immigrants can recreate a new environment for their religiosity, but it could also be that an age effect (those who migrated long before are also older) is also at work. If the latter is true, the fact that the same does not apply to Christian migrants can be really interesting.

Immigrants' religiosity and feelings of discrimination

A large portion of the debate around the religious characteristics of the immigrant populations does not revolve around these characteristics in themselves, but mainly uses them to read and interpret the feeling of discrimination that immigrants face and the effects of this on socioeconomic integration. In order to dig deep into this, we can use a set of items which are present in the European Social survey. These items ask the interviewees whether they describe themselves as a member of a group that is discriminated against in the country of residence and, if this is so, on what grounds the group the discrimination takes place. The interviewees can choose among many possibilities, including religion, colour or race, or language.

Figure 6 shows the percentages of people saying "Yes" or ticking the different options. These are then divided by typology in order to put together the different generations and the different religions.

The message that the graph provides is strikingly evident: Muslims are by far the group that feels most discriminated, and this is also evident when looking at the second generations. In addition, it is plain to see that religion is the main driver of the feeling of discrimination and that it also overtakes the effect of colour or race.

The observed effect on second-generation Muslims deserves attention because it provides a signal of the feelings of a specific group of people. In order to further investigate this issue, Figure 7 explores the item concerning the feeling of being discriminated because of religion while paying attention to the different age groups, with reference to Muslim immigrants and immigrants of "other" religions (who behave as a control group).

Figure 6: Percentages of people describing themselves as members of a discriminated group

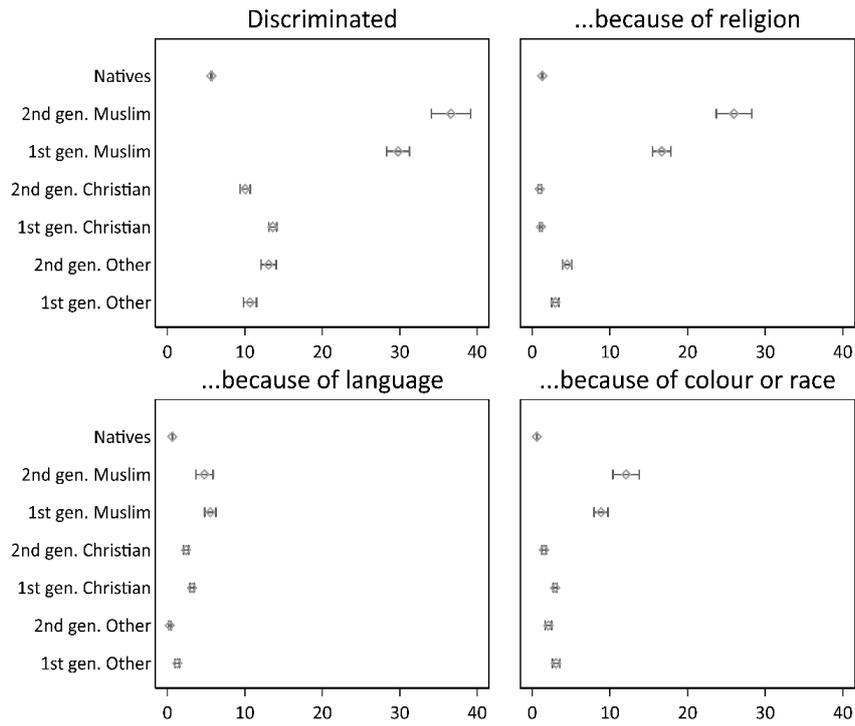
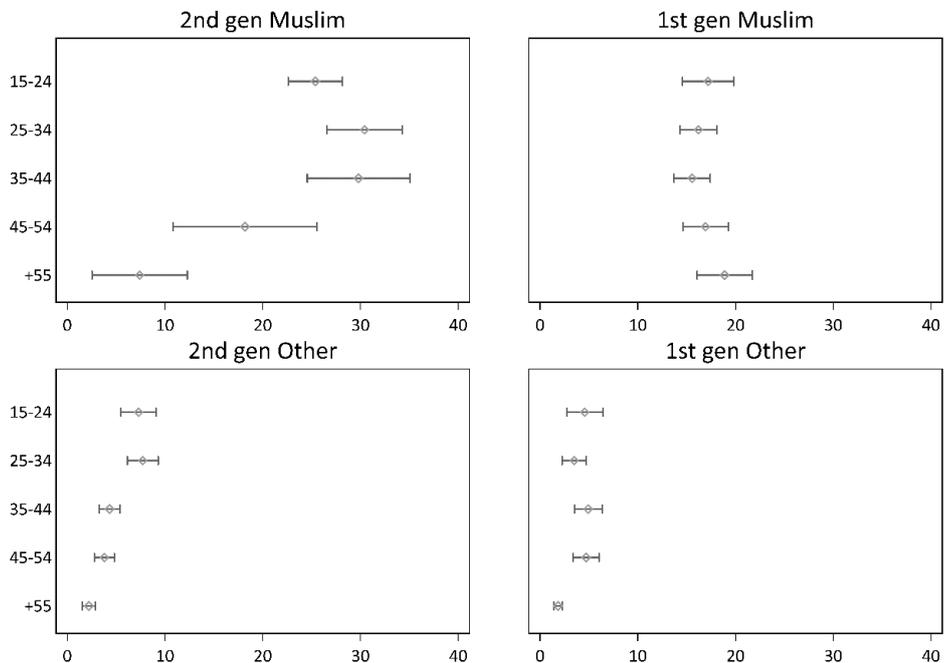


Figure 7: Percentages of people describing themselves as members of a group discriminated because of religion, divided by age group⁵



⁵ Given the small numbers of some groups, the averages were plotted with 90% confidence intervals.

Once again, the results are very clear. There are no (or very minor) age differences as far as immigrants from "other" religions and first-generation Muslim immigrants are concerned. Conversely, there are big differences when looking at second-generation Muslims. Indeed, what the upper left panel shows is that younger second-generation Muslims feel more discriminated than older ones and also more discriminated than first-generation immigrants.

This clearly points out that younger Muslims raised in the new context are an exceptionally vulnerable group who deserve a lot of attention and understanding, also from researchers.

Conclusions

The basic idea behind this article was to provide a comprehensive overview of the patterns of religious evolution among migrants and the feeling of discrimination they perceive. This was done by focusing on European countries using European Social Survey data and by considering the characteristics of the receiving contexts, the differences between first and second generations, and the effect of the passage of time since migration for the first generation of immigrants. In addition to this, the discrimination perceived by immigrants was also analysed. The theoretical base used to read the empirical results shown above is the debate over assimilation and reaction theories, with the former predicting increasing assimilation – and similarity – of the immigrants to the natives and the latter predicting a strengthening of the migrants' religiosity hand in hand with high levels of perceived discrimination.

The first aspect under analysis concerns the influence of the religious context on immigrants' religiosity. What clearly emerges is that this plays a strong role in shaping the immigrants' levels of religiosity: immigrants in more religious countries tend to be more religious themselves, while immigrants in more secular countries tend to be less religious. Within this general reading it is interesting to note that the religiosity of second-generation immigrants almost replicates that of the natives, while that of first-generation immigrants diverges slightly, especially in the most secular European countries. This means that immigrants tend to bring the religious characteristics of their origin to the new contexts, and tend not to let go of them, especially in very secular countries. In addition, it has been shown how a context which supports integration and assimilation helps promote assimilation processes, as is the case in Scandinavian countries.

Following on from this, the article also shows that the religious assimilation of non-Muslim migrants happens quite quickly, requiring only the passage from the first to the second generation to be completed. Conversely, the religious differences between first- and second-generation Muslim immigrants are much smaller, and this points to the fact that Muslim immigrants tend to keep the faith inherited from the country of origin. Moreover, the analysis has shown that immigrants' religiosity tends to decrease with the passing of time since migration, but that only Christian migrants show a clear monotonic pattern in this regard.

By gathering all of these pieces of information, the general reading of the European situation is that the theories about assimilation and social integration mainly fit for non-Muslim migrants (like in the USA), while some expectations from reaction theories apply to Muslim migrants (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012).

While there is no doubt as to the interest of these results about the religious patterns of immigrants, they would remain incomplete without an investigation of

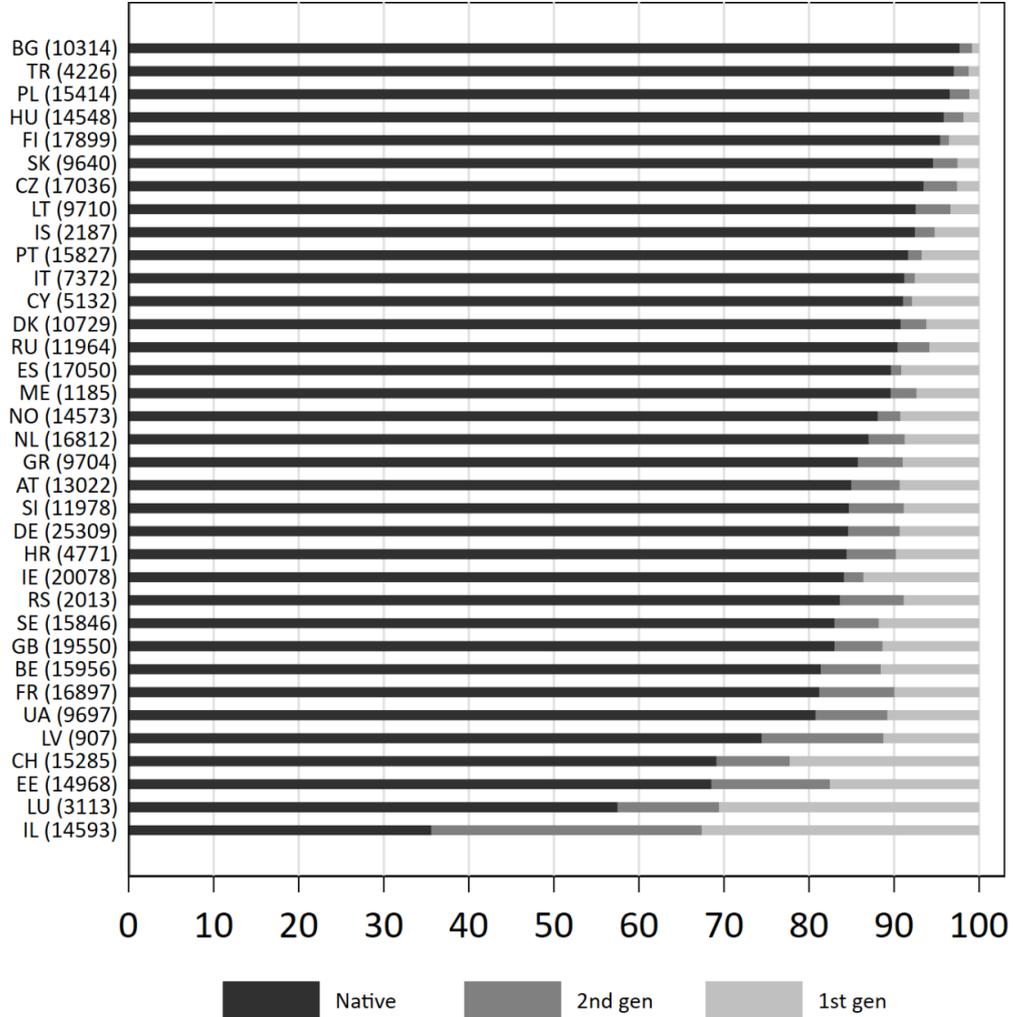
some of the effects that religious characteristics have on the discrimination potentially perceived by immigrants. In this regard, the information contained in the European Social Survey data provided some interesting – and strikingly clear – reading. Not only do Muslim immigrants tend to perceive themselves as more discriminated than other immigrants, but the source of potential discrimination seems to reside in their religious characteristics, which prove to be more important than other characteristics such as their race or language. Moreover, the available data show something even more interesting: while there are no age differences for first-generation Muslim immigrants or for other non-Christian immigrants, they exist and are quite strong for second-generation Muslims. This strongly points to a specific group of people that deserve great attention: young second-generation Muslims (under 45s). They are shown to be slightly less religious than their parents, but they see themselves as much more discriminated for religious reasons. The evident general reading is that these people somehow stand halfway between two contexts; on one side is the religious context of the origin countries which is mainly experienced within the family, and on the other, the religious destination context which is experienced among their peers, in school and within other socialization agencies. This is a core point to address given that this specific group of immigrants experiences the biggest hurdles when it comes to socioeconomic integration and educational performances. While their parents may have resigned themselves to a kind of “subordinate” role in the new context, the new generations are less likely to accept this part: hence, the greater sense of discrimination and the wide range of possible reactions to this.

As said when presenting the data, robust findings point towards younger Muslims being raised in the new context as an exceptionally vulnerable group who deserve a lot of attention and understanding. Of course, this is not entirely new in the field of immigration and religious studies: many interesting contributions have been proposed in recent years concerning this specific section of the population, and many more will follow. I would like to add to this that it is not just the performances of young Muslims that deserve close attention but also, and maybe more importantly, that the core point to address is to understand the reasons behind the feeling of discrimination they perceive. Indeed, these feelings can be seen both as *real* discrimination (such as what happens in schools or in the labour market) and *perceived* discrimination, such as that which is reinforced within family groups (Vermeer, 2014). In this regard, it is the mutual understanding and comprehension between two different generations of migrants which play a significant role in shaping both religious values and integration patterns and deserve attention, as is the aim of the contributions presented in this special issue.

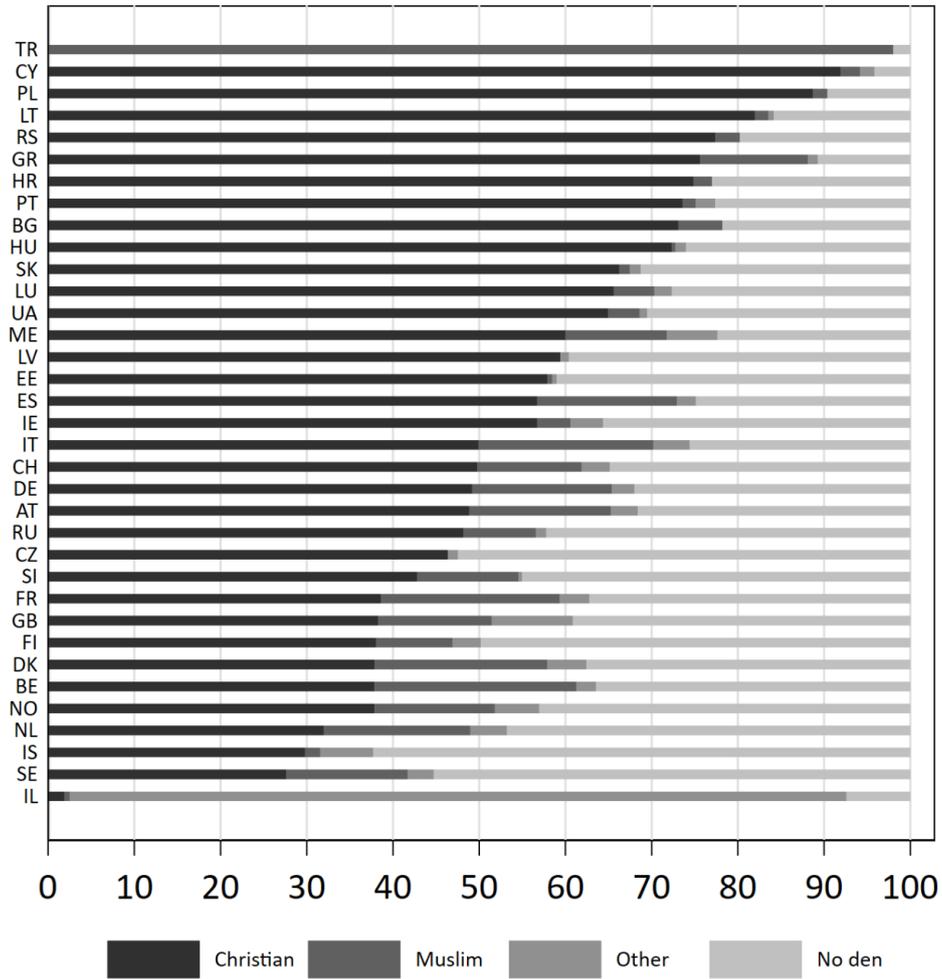
As mentioned, the main aim of this article has been to provide an overview of the complex relationship between immigrants’ religiosity, assimilation pressures, the effect of time and perceived discrimination. This goal was pursued by referring to all the European countries covered by ESS data. However, this approach suffers from two main shortcomings. On one hand, it is purely descriptive, namely it does not propose any model aiming at a more inferential reading: this is surely something which future research must tackle. On the other hand, even though the available data would so permit, it does not adopt a purely comparative framework, namely it does not really focus on the differences between countries, which are somewhat downplayed. Again, this is something which future research must investigate better in order to explore the existence of relevant country characteristics or common patterns which can be used to fruitfully explain different integration paths.

Appendix

Appendix a: Native and immigrant populations in the sample by country (total country cases between parentheses)



Appendix b: Religious denomination of first-generation immigrants by country



Appendix c: Religiosity index, original indicators and basic statistics

	N (valid)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Self-definition	417,874	4.69	3.03	0	10
Service attendance ^a	418,972	1.84	3.50	0	10
Prayer ^a	413,737	3.67	4.64	0	10
Religiosity index	419,415	3.40	3.15	0	10

^a: Recoded as the implied probability of prayer and attending weekly services (multiplied by 10 to conform to the measure of self-definition) as suggested by Hout and Greeley (1987)

Appendix d: Distributions of the main variables used in the paper

	N (valid)	%	% Cum.
Origin			
Native	345,648	83.22	83.22
2nd gen	33,565	8.08	91.30
1st gen	36,153	8.70	100.00
Belonging			
Christian	221,794	54.49	54.49
Muslim	13,757	3.38	57.87
Other	13,910	3.42	61.29
No den.	157,540	38.71	100.00
Time since migration (1st gen)			
<1	526	1.35	1.35
1-5	4,385	11.25	12.6
6-10	4,586	11.76	24.36
11-20	8,540	21.91	46.27
+20	20,946	53.73	100.00
Member of a group discriminated against			
No	385,017	92.93	92.93
Yes	29,299	7.07	100.00
..because of religion			
Not marked	414,812	98.8	98.8
Marked	5,059	1.2	100.00
..because of language			
Not marked	416,512	99.2	99.2
Marked	3,359	0.8	100.00
..because of ethnic origin			
Not marked	416,138	99.11	99.11
Marked	3,733	0.89	100.00
..because of colour or race			
Not marked	415,798	99.03	99.03
Marked	4,073	0.97	100.00

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